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LETTER DATED 10 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward to you a briefing statement made by Haile Weldensae, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea, on 9 March 1999 to the diplomatic community accredited to Eritrea (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Briefing statement made on 9 March 1999 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea to the diplomatic community accredited to Eritrea

1. In an 8 p.m. broadcast on 8 March 1999, Radio Ethiopia reported that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia had, in a meeting with African diplomats stationed in Addis Ababa, declared that Ethiopia viewed with great doubt the acceptance by Eritrea of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement. The four reasons given as a basis for this doubt were the following:

> "(a) Official statements by Eritrean authorities have repeatedly stated that they are making preparations for a fresh invasion of Ethiopia.
>
> "(b) The Eritrean Government has not announced the decision to accept the OAU Framework Agreement to the Eritrean people on radio.
>
> "(c) Eritrean communications to various Governments and international organizations regarding its acceptance of the Framework Agreement were concluded in confusing phrases.
>
> "(d) The activities of the Eritrean Defence Forces in the war fronts are a reflection of a country intent on war."

2. These ludicrous prevarications can only be attributed to the diplomacy of a Government whose duplicity has run out of steam. It is now common knowledge that Eritrea had warned the world community of Ethiopia's impending aggression between 15 January and 15 February 1999. It is also common knowledge that it was Ethiopia that invaded Eritrea, broke the air moratorium and refuses all calls for a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities by the international community. It has been - and continues to be - condemned for all these acts by the United Nations, the United States Government and other parties. In the event, it is hypocritical and mind-boggling newspeak to claim that "Eritrea is concerned with its defensive measures because it is intent on continuing the war."

3. I myself announced in an interview with Eritrean Television on 27 February 1999 that Eritrea has formally accepted the OAU Framework Agreement. This was repeated on Eritrean Radio the next morning in all Eritrean languages as well in Amharic, English and Oromoffia. The message was clear and understood by the Eritrean people - and almost certainly the majority of the Ethiopian people who listened to the broadcast. It must also be understood that it is none of Ethiopia's business how a sovereign State communicates with its people.

4. That notwithstanding, however, it is elementary that it is Eritrea's communications to the peacebrokers, including the current Chairman of OAU, the Secretary-General of OAU, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the United States, and the clarity of the message contained in the communications that are important for the initiation of peacemaking and the resolution of the conflict. All the parties have understood the message, congratulated Eritrea and requested Ethiopia to abide by its previous

commitment. The Ethiopian Government is being denounced by all concerned for not heeding advice.

5. The absurd claim that the Eritrean messages were not clear enough is repudiated by these denunciations of Ethiopia and the calls made to it by several parties that it should start to implement the Framework Agreement without delay. Needless to say, Eritrea's reiteration of its position and its creation of a committee to follow up implementation of the Framework Agreement to the OAU delegation that visited Asmara from 4 to 6 March 1999 should have cast away any doubt even with Ethiopian authorities.

6. It is clear that all this clumsy manoeuvring is only part of a thinly veiled policy to renege on its oft-repeated "unconditional commitment" to the OAU Framework Agreement, and to continue its aggression with a view to achieving its ulterior motives beyond the border dispute.

7. It is for this reason that the Prime Minister of Ethiopia had to tell an outright lie to the diplomats. His claim that the OAU High-level Delegation had informed him that the withdrawal of Eritrean troops would include areas other than Badme and its environs is belied by the record. The Framework Agreement provides for withdrawal as follows:

> "In order to create conditions conducive to a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict through the delimitation and demarcation of the border, the armed forces presently in Badme Town and its environs, should be redeployed to the positions they held before 6 May 1998 as a mark of goodwill and consideration for our continental Organization, it being understood that this redeployment will not prejudge the final status of the area concerned, which will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation of the border and, if need be, through an appropriate mechanism of arbitration."

8. Environs was defined as "the area surrounding Badme Town". The OAU clarification on redeployment and demilitarization given to the Government of Eritrea further reads: "the redeployment is of Eritrean troops from Badme Town and its environs (defined as the areas surrounding the town). This should be immediately followed by the demilitarization of the entire border, through the redeployment of the forces of both parties along the entire border, to positions to be determined subsequently, as part of the implementation process of the Framework Agreement".

9. The Ethiopian Prime Minister vainly attempts to inject new elements consisting of Ethiopia's wild allegations into the Framework Agreement. These include acceptance of responsibility by the Eritrean Government for the alleged destruction of Badme, the cost of demining the area around Badme and the loss of life and destruction of property caused by the war. He seems to forget that it was his Government that has been, for the best part of nine months, beating war drums and threatening the destruction of Eritrea; had amassed an army which included more than 200 foreign mercenaries, 13-year-old boy soldiers and press-ganged youth (including some from neighbouring countries) in preparation for an aggression; and actually committed aggression along three fronts since 6 February 1999.

10. It has now become evident that the conflict has ceased to be a border dispute. It is now an attempt to subvert a sovereign Government in contravention of international law. It is because the United Nations Security Council seems to be an obstacle to the achievement of these objectives that it has now become the latest victim of Ethiopia's hate campaign.

11. Having refused to implement the Framework Agreement, the Ethiopian Government is now feverishly finalizing preparations for a renewed offensive which may take place at any time. In spite of this, the Eritrean Government reiterates its continued commitment to ceasefire and cessation of hostilities as well as the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

12. I seize this opportunity to request your excellencies to inform your respective Governments and organizations of the impending offensive and to extend our request for its denunciation.